DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 382 RC 017 842

AUTHOR	Howley, Craig
TITLE	Briefs for Parents in Ready-to-Copy Form.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, Charleston, WV.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Sep 90
CONTRACT	R188062016
NOTE	22p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC/CRESS, Appalachia Educational Laboratory, P.O. Box 1348. Charleston, WV 25325.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071) -- Multilingual/Bilingual Materials (171)
LANGUAGE	English; Spanish
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; *Mathematics Education; Parent Education; *Parent Participation; Parent Role; Reading Improvement; Rural Education; *School Size; Sex Differences; Small Schools; *Student Financial Aid; *Television Viewing; *Writing Improvement
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC

ABSTRACT

This document consists of a compilation of 12 brief articles prepared as "fillers" for rural newsweeklies. Six of the briefs (the first six listed below) are provided in both English and Spanish language versions. These camera-ready slicks inform readers about current educational research and practice. "Starve an Addict, Feed a Reader!" discusses the negative effects of television on children's reading achievement and suggests household rules parents can make to help limit TV time. "Why Bother: Aren't We Too Poor To Send the Kids to College?" helps parents to learn about financial aid for low-income students. "Shouldn't We Leave Schooling to the Professionals?" discusses the importance of parents' role in children's education and describes ERIC as an information resource for parents. "Aren't Big Schools Better than Small Schools?" describes the benefits of small schools, especially for rural areas. "What Can Parents Do To Help Their Children Write Well?" offers tips for parents who want to coach their children in their writing. "Who Says Math Is For Boys?" encourages parents and educators to promote girls' interest in math. "Why Do Parents Like Some Teachers More Than Others?" emphasizes the teacher's role in bridging parents and schools. "Keeping Track: Aren't Grades Enough?" advises parents to understand test scores. "What Does It Take to Do Well in School?" helps parents organize children's learning. "Can Parents Get More Out of School Meeting?" shows how to direct a school meeting to problem-solving. "Is Reading So Important Anymore?" stresses the key role of reading in learning and offers ways by which parents help children read. "Why Don't Our Children Like Math?" discusses making math interesting to children by game play. (TES)

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ERIC CRESS

Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools

Briefs for Parents in Ready-to-Copy Form

(English Versions)

In plain language these 12 briefs state what researchers and practitioners have learned. Originally prepared as articles for rural newsweeklies as "filler," the 12 briefs have been given high marks by both editors and readers.

You'll probably come up with a variety of uses for these briefs, once you review them. Other educators and community organizations, however, have used the briefs...

- *in class, school, or district newsletters;*
- *in report cards;*
- *for handouts at PTA or PTO meetings;*
- *for parent conferences;*
- *for distribution in public waiting rooms (for example, doctors' offices, post offices, health departments);*
- *as readings in parent information or training courses;*
- *in school handbooks or in orientation materials for parents of incoming students;*
- *in teacher inservice packets; or*
- *in school calendars.*

RC017842

This publication was prepared with funding from the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, under contract no. RI-88-062016. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement or the Department of Education.

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September 1990

Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools

Briefs for Parents in Ready-to-Copy Form
(Bilingual Versions)

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Response Form

We'd like to know how you used or plan to use these briefs, and what you think of them. We'd also like to offer you a free subscription to our newsletter, the ERIC/CRESS Bulletin. A sign-up form appears at the bottom of this response form.

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How many briefs did you or do you plan to use?
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What is the overall quality of the briefs?
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Check one primary role:
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At which institutional level are you located: (check one)
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- ☐ secondary
- ☐ postsecondary
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What is your scope of interest (check no more than 3):
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- ☐ migrants
- ☐ outdoor education
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- ☐ small schools

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Starve an Addict, Feed a Reader!

"THE BEAV" of Leave-It-To-Beaver fame had this to say about reading: "You got to learn to read. If you couldn't read, you couldn't look up what was on television." Actually, that's a good point. It implies that all of us—children included—need to *decide* what we want to watch. Channel-chasing, unfortunately, is the way many people make that decision. There are better ways.

Deciding what to watch takes some work, because it's easy to get "hooked" on television. And once hooked, it's not so easy to kick the habit.

When children become hooked on television, their schoolwork can suffer. Children who watch a lot of TV (more than two or three hours a day) usually have below-average reading achievement. If they watch a *moderate* amount of TV, however, they usually have above-average reading achievement. What things can parents do to help the family—and especially the children—change a bad TV habit?

Parents can take steps to limit the amount of time children spend "glued to the tube." A good idea is to make decisions as a family. The family can consider everyone's interests, but compromise will be necessary.

Parents can also make some simple rules to help limit TV time. For example, they can forbid after-school TV watching—at least until they get home from work or until the children's homework is done. Parents might also decide that watching TV should be a family event.

Family gatherings at the television have an important advantage. They give children and parents the chance to talk about the programs they watch. Families can talk about what they like and don't like. They can talk about the issues that come up in almost any program—sitcoms, movies, and even game shows. And, as a result, they can make changes in what they decide to watch. This kind of talk, after all, is an important part of learning—in school and out of school.

Such rules, however, are more of a problem if children have television sets in their own bedrooms. Children may abuse the rules if they have their own TV sets. In this case, parents might think about removing the TV sets. Children will, of course, resent this move. But—given parents' concern for the importance of schoolwork—it's a fair decision.

Staff of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) prepared this article. ERIC/CRESS, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is part of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). There are 16 ERIC clearinghouses nationwide. To order a free copy of an ERIC publication on "Television Viewing and Reading," just call ERIC/CRESS (toll-free) at 800/624-9120 (Eastern Time Zone). Ask for "User Services."

Mate de hambre al adicto, alimente al lector

EL PERSONAJE "Beav" del programa de televisión "Leave-It-To-Beaver" ha dicho esto sobre la lectura: "Uno tiene que aprender a leer. Si no puede uno leer, no puede buscar (en la guía de televisión) los programas que muestran." Tiene razón en esto, ya que implica que todos nosotros, incluso los niños, tenemos que decidir qué es lo que queremos mirar. Desafortunadamente, muchas personas deciden esto cambiando los canales, pero existen mejores medios.

Se necesita algún esfuerzo para decidir qué mirar en la televisión, ya que es muy fácil enviciarse y muy difícil dejar el hábito una vez creado. Cuando los niños se envician con la televisión, sus estudios pueden perjudicarse. Los niños que miran más de dos o tres horas de televisión al día tienen un nivel de lectura bajo y un nivel alto si miran la televisión moderadamente. ¿Qué pueden hacer los padres para ayudar a la familia, y en especial a los niños, a cambiar un mal hábito?

Los padres pueden establecer ciertas reglas para restringir el tiempo que los niños pasan enchufados al televisor. Es bueno que toda la familia tome las decisiones en conjunto, teniendo en cuenta el interés de cada uno al adoptar una medida. Los padres pueden adoptar reglas como prohibirles a los hijos ver televisión después de clases o hasta que ellos lleguen del trabajo o los niños terminen sus deberes escolares. Quizás los padres decidan que mirar la televisión debe ser una actividad para toda la familia.

Mirar la televisión en familia ofrece a los padres e hijos la importante ventaja de hablar sobre lo que les gusta y lo que no les gusta, y sobre los temas que surgen en casi cualquier programa como comedias, películas y aun concursos o juegos televisivos. Como resultado pueden hacer cambios en su elección de programas. Este tipo de discusión es, después de todo, una parte importante del apren-dizaje del niño en la escuela y fuera de ella.

Reglas de esta índole pueden constituir un problema mayor si los niños tienen televisores en sus dormitorios, ya que esto les da la oportunidad de desobedecer dichas reglas. En estos casos los padres podrían sacar los televisores del cuarto de sus hijos. Los niños sin duda se sentirían resentidos ante esta medida pero, dado la preocupación por parte de los padres sobre el trabajo escolar de sus hijos, la desición es justa.

El personal de ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) (Local ERIC sobre Educación Rural y Escuelas Pequeñas) ha preparado este artículo. ERIC/CRESS, subsidiado por el Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos, es parte del Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) (Centro de Información de Recursos Educacionales). Hay 16 locales de ERIC en el país. Para ordenar un ejemplar gratis de "Television Viewing and Reading" ("La televisión y la lectura"), llame gratis al 1-800/624-9120 (hora del este) y pregunte por "User Services."

Why Bother: Aren't We Too Poor To Send the Kids to College?

WHEREVER they live, families with incomes below $10,000 a year do not have anything ex.ra to spend on college. The effect is obvious. Fifteen percent of families earn less than $10,000 a year. But only 7 percent of college students come from these families.

Parents should not tell their children they cannot go to college just because they are poor, however. Low-income students who are ready for college *can* get financial support. The trick is to create a good plan to pay for college. School counselors can help families sort out the details.

For low-income students, access to a variety of financial aid packages is very important. Five basic federal aid programs provide most support to low-income students. These programs are: Pell Grants, Guaranteed Student Loans, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, National Direct Student Loans, and College Work-Study.

Parents also need to know that aid varies among different types of colleges—in-state, out-of-state, private, public. For example, colleges manage the last three federally funded programs mentioned above, but not all colleges participate in each program.

A recent study says that most low-income students can expect to receive at least $1000 yearly from Pell Grants. Low-income students at expensive private colleges often receive the maximum $1800 Pell Grant. The federal government—not colleges—manages these grants.

Other government and private sources provide aid. Many offer support for ethnic minorities, for students who enter certain jobs, or for students attending particular colleges.

Good planning involves parents, counselors, and students as a team. Every member of the team must play an active role. Parents and students need to fill out financial aid forms. Students need to complete applications and take college entrance tests. Counselors need to meet with parents and students to guide them in exploring choices. All this takes work, but it makes a big difference for low-income students.

Finally, parents don't need to wait for counselors to contact them. They can call to set up appointments as soon as their children are in the ninth or tenth grade.

"How Low-Income Families Pay for College" is available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) for $4.00 plus postage. The order number is ED 260 673. Call EDRS at 800/227-3742 (toll-free) for information about ordering.

"ERIC" stands for the Educational Resources Information Center. Staff of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools prepared this article. To learn more about ERIC or the services of ERIC/CRESS call 800/624-9120, toll-free (Eastern Time Zone). Ask for "User Services."

¿Por qué preocuparnos? ¿No somos muy pobres para mandar los chicos a la universidad?

LAS familias con un ingreso de menos de $10,000 al año, no importa donde vivan, no tienen dinero para invertir en la universidad. El resultado de esto es obvio. Hay un 15% de familias que ganan menos de $10,000 anuales pero sólo un 7% de estudiantes universitarios provienen de estas familias. Sin embargo, los padres no deben decirles a sus hijos que no pueden asistir a la universidad sólo porque son pobres. Los estudiantes de bajo ingreso económico que estén preparados para la universidad pueden recibir ayuda económica. La clave consiste en crear un buen plan para costear los estudios universitarios. Los consejeros de las escuelas pueden ayudar a los padres en esto.

Es muy importante que los estudiantes de bajo ingreso tengan acceso a medios informativos sobre ayuda económica. Existen cinco programas básicos de ayuda federal para estudiantes de bajo ingreso. Estos son: Pell Grants, Guaranteed Student Loans, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, National Direct Student Loans y College Work-Study. También es necesario que los padres sepan que el tipo de ayuda varía según la universidad (si está dentro o fuera del estado de residencia del estudiante, si es privada o pública). Por ejemplo, las universidades dirigen los tres últimos programas federales arriba mencionados, pero no todas participan en cada programa.

Un reciente estudio indica que la mayoría de estudiantes de bajo ingreso pueden recibir un mínimo de $1000 al año de Pell Grants y un máximo de $1800 si asisten a universidades privadas costosas. El gobierno federal, no las universidades, dirigen estos programas.

Existen otras venas de ayuda gubernamentales y privadas. Muchos de ellos ofrecen ayuda a minorías étnicas, a estudiantes especializados en ciertas áreas de trabajo o a estudiantes que asisten a ciertas universidades.

Para planear bien se necesita una colaboración de equipo de padres, consejeros y estudiantes y cada miembro debe desempeñar una función. Los padres y los estudiantes deben llenar formularios para pedir ayuda económica. Los estudiantes tienen que llenar solicitudes y rendir exámenes para entrar a la universidad. Los consejeros deben reunirse con padres y estudiantes para discutir las posibilidades disponibles. Esto requiere esfuerzo pero puede ser de gran utilidad para los estudiantes de bajo ingreso económico. Los padres mismos pueden ser los primeros en ponerse en contacto con los consejeros cuando sus hijos lleguen al noveno o décimo grado.

Pueden obtener el panfleto "How Low-Income Families Pay for College" ("Cómo las familias de bajo ingreso costean la universidad") en ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) por el precio de $4.00 más el envío de correos. El número de referencia para ordenarlo es ED 260 673. Para más información llame gratis a EDRS al 1-800/227-3742.

"ERIC" es el Educational Resources Information Center (Centro de Información de Recursos Educacionales). El personal de ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (Local ERIC sobre Educación Rural y Escuelas Pequeñas) ha preparado este artículo. Para más información sobre ERIC y los servicios proporcionados por ERIC/CRESS llame gratis al 1-800/624-9120 (hora del este) y pregunte por "User Services."

Shouldn't We Leave Schooling to the Professionals

SHOULDN'T we leave schooling to professionals? Most parents and, in fact, most educators would say "No." Almost everyone agrees that parents are, after all, their children's most important teachers. Children learn to tell right from wrong from parents. Children learn to tell what's important in life from what's foolish or from what's just plain dangerous. And finally, children learn what it *might mean* to become an adult *from their parents*.

But becoming an adult has a lot to do with schooling, too. Children need to get the right kind of schooling, and they need enough of it to make a living *and* to make sense of the world. For parents, however, it's not easy to understand how schools work. It's even harder to understand how schools *should* work.

Where can parents turn with their questions about their children's schooling? Most personal contacts can't really reflect all the viewpoints and information sources that might help parents.

ERIC—the Educational Resources Information Center—can help. ERIC is like a national library about education, with 16 clearinghouses specializing in different topics. The U.S. Department of Education operates the computer-based ERIC system.

ERIC has a vast collection (over 700,000 articles and documents). *Anyone* interested in schooling can use that collection.

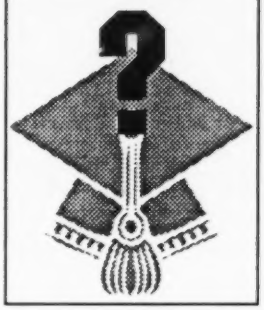
Now, it's easier for parents to ask ERIC for help. A new 86-page guide to ERIC, *A Parents' Guide to the ERIC Database*, explains what parents need to know in order to use ERIC. It's written clearly, and it features inexpensive resources for parents available from ERIC. It also shows parents how to ask and how to get answers for their own questions about schooling.

Schooling is a complicated business. Two million teachers work with over 40 million students in 16,000 school districts and nearly 80,000 schools. Students come to school from a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and with an even wider variety of hopes, fears, and needs.

The *Parent's Guide* can help parents learn what they need to know to help their own children make the most of their years in school. It describes articles and reports written especially for parents and available from ERIC, and it gives information about ordering them. It also describes ERIC in detail and shows parents how to use ERIC to search for information about topics that concern *them*.

The *Guide* is available, postpaid, for $6.00 from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS), P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325. To order, call toll-free 800/624-9120 (Eastern Time Zone) and ask for "User Services."

¿Debemos dejar la educación en manos de los profesionales



¿DEBEMOS dejar la educación en manos de los profesionales? La mayoría de los padres y, de hecho, de los educadores dirían que no. Casi todo el mundo está de acuerdo en que los padres son, después de todo, los maestros más importantes de sus hijos. Los niños aprenden a distinguir el bien del mal de sus padres y a diferenciar lo importante de lo insignificante o lo sencillamente peligroso. Finalmente los niños aprenden de sus padres lo que significa ser un adulto.

Hacerse adulto tiene mucho que ver con la educación escolar. Los niños necesitan una educación apropiada para poder mantenerse y que les permita darle sentido a la vida. No es fácil para los padres, sin embargo, entender cómo funcionan las escuelas; y es mucho más difícil aún entender cómo deberían funcionar.

¿A quién pueden los padres dirigir las preguntas sobre la educación de sus hijos? La mayoría de sus conocidos no tienen los puntos de vista y las fuentes de información que podrían ser de utilidad a los padres. ERIC—el Educational Resources Information Center (Centro de Información de Recursos Educacionales)—puede ser de ayuda. ERIC es como una biblioteca nacional de educación, con 16 locales especializados en materias diferentes. El Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos dirige el sistema basado en computadoras de ERIC. ERIC tiene una vasta colección: más de 700,000 artículos y documentos. Cualquiera que se interese en la educación escolar puede hacer uso de esa colección.

Resulta más fácil ahora para los padres solicitar ayuda de ERIC. En la nueva guía de 86 páginas, *A Parent's Guide to the ERIC Database (Guía para los padres a la base de datos de ERIC)*, se explica cómo utilizar los servicios de ERIC. En un lenguaje claro, se muestran recursos módicos disponibles a los padres por medio de ERIC. En la *Guía* también se les enseña a los padres a hacer y a obtener las respuestas a sus propias preguntas sobre la educación.

La educación es un asunto complicado. Dos millones de maestros trabajan con 40 millones de estudiantes en 16,000 distritos escolares y alrededor de 80,000 escuelas. Los estudiantes que asisten a la escuela provienen de ambientes étnicos y culturales diferentes tienen esperanzas, temores y necesidades muy variadas.

La *Guía* puede enseñar a los padres lo necesario para ayudar a sus hijos a sacar el mayor provecho de sus años escolares. Contiene una descripción de artículos e informes disponibles a los padres a través de ERIC, escritos especialmente para ellos, e información de cómo ordenarlos. También hay una descripción detallada de ERIC e instrucciones de cómo buscar información sobre temas de interés para los padres.

La *Guía* se puede obtener por $6.00 (correo pagado) en la siguiente dirección: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS), P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV, 25325. Para solicitarlo, llame gratis al 1-800/624-9120 (hora del este) y pida hablar con el departamento de "User Services."

Aren't Big Schools Better Than Small Schools?

IF YOU COULD choose to send your children to a very large or a small school, which would you pick? Most parents don't have this choice, of course. But *many* communities have had to face the choice of closing their small schools. In low-income areas, the pressure is on to save money, and small schools seem to be more costly than large schools. Is there any good reason to preserve small schools?

Early in the nation's history most schools were *very* small. But between 1900 and 1980, school size rose sharply. The change allowed each teacher to teach a single age group in "grade" schools. It also allowed high school teachers to specialize in single subjects. Educators hoped that the changes would help students learn better. During this period "bigger was better." Today, many of the remaining small schools are in rural areas, where poverty rates are, on average, as high as those in center cities.

At least since the early 1960s, educators have known that smaller schools tend to be more friendly places than large schools. But what about students' learning? The "bigger is better" view holds that learning is better in large schools.

Recent studies, however, suggest that small school size also has a positive influence on *students' learning*. This seems to be especially true in low-income communities. A new study of schools in California shows that in low-income districts with small schools, students learn more. In high-income districts, however, students seem to learn more in large schools.

The lesson may be that small schools serve an important role, especially in low-income areas. There may be long-term advantages in maintaining—and improving—small schools. For example, students whose experiences in schools are not good have more trouble making their way in life. They are more likely to require unemployment and welfare benefits, adult training, and other costly social supports. They are less likely to find meaningful and productive work. As a result, they are less likely to pay taxes that support programs that benefit everyone. These facts suggest that closing small schools might wind up costing much more in the long term than it saves in the short term.

Staff of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) prepared this article. ERIC/CRESS, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is part of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). There are 16 ERIC clearinghouses nationwide. ERIC/CRESS has a free publication on the subject of this article. Just call ERIC/CRESS "User Services" toll-free at 800/624-9120 (Eastern Time Zone) and ask for a copy of "What is the Effect of Small-Scale Schooling on Student Achievement?"

¿Son mejores las escuelas grandes que las pequeñas?

SI USTED pudiera escoger entre una escuela grande o una escuela pequeña para sus hijos, ¿cuál escogería? La mayoría de los padres no tienen esta opción, por supuesto. Sin embargo, muchas comunidades han tenido que enfrentarse a la decisión de cerrar sus escuelas pequeñas. En áreas de bajo ingreso económico es apremiante ahorrar dinero y las escuelas pequeñas parecen ser más costosas que las grandes. ¿Existe, pues, alguna buena razón para preservar las escuelas pequeñas?

En la historia temprana de esta nación, las escuelas eran en su mayoría pequeñas. Entre 1900 y 1980, sin embargo, las escuelas crecieron en tamaño rápidamente. Este cambio hizo posible que cada maestro enseñara a un grupo de niños de la misma edad escolar. Asimismo, los maestros de la escuela secundaria pudieron especializarse en una materia. Los educadores esperaban que estos cambios facilitaran el aprendizaje de los estudiantes. En este tiempo se creía que las escuelas, mientras más grandes, mejor. Hoy, las escuelas pequeñas están en áreas rurales, donde la pobreza por lo general alcanza un nivel tan alto como en las ciudades.

Desde comienzos de 1960, los educadores han reconocido que las escuelas pequeñas tienen una atmósfera más amistosa que las grandes. Pero, ¿qué pasa con el aprendizaje de los estudiantes? Los que creen que "mientras más grande mejor," opinan que el aprendizaje es mejor en las escuelas grandes.

Estudios recientes, sin embargo, sugieren que las escuelas pequeñas también ejercen una influencia positiva en el aprendizaje del estudiante, especialmente en las comunidades de bajo ingreso económico. Un nuevo estudio sobre las escuelas en California demuestra que en los distritos de bajo ingreso que tienen escuelas pequeñas los estudiantes aprenden más. En los distritos de alto ingreso, sin embargo, los estudiantes parecen aprender más en las escuelas grandes.

La conclusión de todo esto podría ser que las escuelas pequeñas desempeñan una función importante en el aprendizaje del niño, especialmente en las áreas de bajo nivel económico. Preservar y mejorar la calidad de las escuelas pequeñas puede traer ventajas en un futuro. Por ejemplo, los estudiantes cuyas experiencias en la escuela no son buenas tienen más dificultad en la vida; tienden a necesitar, entre otros, beneficios sociales costosos tales como ayuda de desempleo, ayuda social y entrenamiento para adultos. Tienen menos probabilidad de conseguir un trabajo productivo que les interese. Como resultado, no están en posición de pagar impuestos que costean programas de beneficio general. Estos hechos sugieren que el cierre de escuelas pequeñas podría terminar costando más a la larga.

El personal de ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) (Local ERIC sobre Educación Rural y Escuelas Pequeñas) ha preparado este artículo. ERIC/CRESS, subsidiado por el Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos, es parte del Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) (Centro de Información de Recursos Educacionales). Hay 16 locales de ERIC en el país. ERIC/CRESS ofrece una publicación gratis sobre el tema de este artículo. Llame gratis a ERIC/CRESS "User Services" al 1-800/624-9120 (hora del este) y pida un ejemplar de "What is the Effect of Small-Scale Schooling on Student Achievement?" ("¿Qué efecto tiene la educación en las escuelas pequeñas en el logro académico del estudiante?").

What Can Parents Do to Help Their Children Write Well?

What can parents do to help their children become better writers? First, they need to recognize that good writing is much more than correct penmanship and spelling. It is the skill of organizing and expressing thoughts so others can share them. Writing well is an advanced skill. It takes years to develop.

To write well, students need careful coaching throughout their years in school. Coaching helps athletes improve their performance, understanding, and enjoyment of a sport. Writing is a lot like sports. It's complex and it takes a lot of practice. Young writers—like young athletes—need feedback, praise, and helpful criticism.

Parents can help by doing some of the things good coaches do. For example, coaches and athletes *participate* in sports events together. They also work together to improve team performance and individual understanding of the game. The same two principles apply to how parents can help children become better writers.

Parents can monitor school writing assignments. They can discuss the importance of an assignment, and they can help children break the assignment into manageable parts. One very important part of writing, for example, is the process of rewriting a first draft. Most children don't understand the need to rewrite, and they need help. The trick is to point out changes that would improve a first draft—together with praising the draft's strong points. That's coaching.

Reading together is also an activity that can help. It's like watching a sports event as a family. It brings parents and children together for something important to both. Reading and writing are two sides of the same coin. Typically, skill in reading comes first: good writing usually doesn't emerge without lots of reading.

One strategy is to set aside time for reading instead of watching TV. Any book or article or story will do, so long as it's interesting to both parent and child. The idea here is to involve children in *enjoying* the written word. It also gives children *models* of how good writers actually write.

Parents who want to help their children learn to write—and to think—can learn more in a free pamphlet. The pamphlet is "Helping Your Child Learn to Write Well." Just call the U.S. Department of Education (toll-free) at 800/424-1616 and ask for a copy.

Staff of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) prepared this article. ERIC/CRESS, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is part of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). There are 16 ERIC clearinghouses nationwide. To find out more about the ERIC system and ERIC/CRESS, call (toll-free) 800/624-9120 (Eastern Time Zone). Ask for "User Services."

¿Qué pueden hacer los padres para ayudar a sus hijos a escribir bien?

¿QUÉ pueden hacer los padres para que sus hijos escriban mejor? Primeramente tienen que reconocer que el escribir bien implica más que tener una buena caligrafía y una buena ortografía. Es el arte de organizar y expresar ideas para poder compartirlas con otros. Escribir bien es un talento de nivel avanzado. Se requieren años para desarrollarlo.

Para escribir bien los estudiantes tienen que ser guiados cuidadosamente a traves de sus años escolares. El entrenamiento ayuda a los atletas a mejorar su abilidad y a comprender y disfrutar más de un deporte. El escribir se parece mucho a los deportes: es complejo y requiere mucha práctica. Los 'escritores' jóvenes, como los atletas, necesitan evaluación, elogio y crítica útil.

Para ayudar, los padres pueden hacer algunas de las cosas que hacen los buenos entrenadores. Por ejemplo, los entrenadores participan junto con los atletas en eventos deportivos. También colaboran con ellos para mejorar el equipo y a que cada miembro mejore su comprensión del partido. Los padres pueden implementar ambas tácticas para que sus hijos aprendan a escribir mejor.

Los padres pueden supervisar a sus hijos en las asignaciones de la escuela. Pueden discutir con ellos la importancia de una asignación y ayudarlos a dividir la misma en partes para que se les haga más comprensible la tarea. Un aspecto importante de escribir es la re-escritura. La mayoría de los niños necesitan que se les ayude a ver la necesidad de una segunda escritura. La clave radica en señalar los cambios que mejorarían la calidad del primer ensayo, sin dejar de alabar los puntos positivos. Esto es entrenar.

Una actividad útil es la lectura colectiva. Esto es como mirar un evento deportivo en familia. Une a padres e hijos bajo un interés común. Leer y escribir son las dos caras de una misma moneda. Normalmente se necesita destreza en la lectura para poder escribir bien. Leer mucho precede el escribir bien.

Una buena estrategia es emplear tiempo en leer en vez de mirar la televisión. Cualquier libro, artículo o cuento que sea de interés para el padre y el niño puede servir. El objetivo es que el niño disfrute de la palabra escrita y que se le provea de modelos de buena escritura.

Los padres que deseen enseñar a sus hijos a escribir, y a pensar, pueden informarse más sobre este asunto con el panfleto "Helping your Child Learn to Write Well" ("Ayude a su hijo a escribir bien"). Llame gratis al Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos al 1-800/424-1616 y pida un ejemplar gratis.

El personal de ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) (Local ERIC sobre Educación Rural y Escuelas Pequeñas) ha preparado este artículo. ERIC/CRESS, subsidiado por el Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos, es parte del Educational Resources Education Center (ERIC) (Centro de Información de Recursos Educacionales). Hay 16 locales ERIC en el país. Para más información sobre ERIC y ERIC/CRESS, llame gratis al 1-800/624-9120 (hora del este) y pregunte por "User Services."

Who Says Math is for Boys?

FEW people any more come right out and say, "Math isn't for girls." Instead, girls seem to get a more subtle—and more harmful—message. The message is that studying math makes them less feminine.

In spite of this message, girls and boys are equally *interested* in math as they start high school. Girls enroll in *beginning* courses (for example, Algebra I and Geometry) just as often as boys. But as they go through high school, girls' interest falls and their confidence ebbs. They don't go on to take advanced courses.

That's a problem. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, course-taking in math strongly influences achievement. Students who take six or seven courses in math do *three times as well* as students who take only one course! (In English and Social Studies, course-taking doesn't influence achievement so much.)

Most studies suggest that if girls and boys take equal numbers of math courses, they perform equally well. One recent study suggests that girls do *better*. Why, then, do girls lose interest and confidence in their ability to do math in high school?

We can't be sure. Whatever the answers, it's clear that, if girls are less well *prepared* in math than boys, the fault is ours. In general, we just don't develop the mathematics talent of girls as well as we do the talent of boys. This trend makes good comparisons very difficult. The fact is that math *cannot* be just for boys. Too much depends on math.

Almost every job in the modern world can be done better by someone who understands math well. That includes teaching and nursing, as well as engineering and business management. Several generations have shown that these jobs can be done equally well by men or women. Whatever job a particular young woman chooses, it's important that she know math well.

Girls need good math teachers who can build their confidence and encourage their interest. They need teachers who can help them—who can *expect* them—to do challenging work in math class. They need parents and relatives to show them that mathematics is part of what it means to be a young woman.

Staff of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) prepared this article. ERIC/CRESS, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is part of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). There are 16 ERIC clearinghouses nationwide. To find out more about the resources of the ERIC system and ERIC/CRESS, call (toll-free) 800/624-9120 (Eastern Time Zone) and ask for "User Services." To order a free copy of "How to Help Your Child Learn Math," call the U.S. Department of Education at 800/424-1616.

¿Quién dice que las matemáticas son para

YA MUY pocas personas dicen abiertamente que las matemáticas no son para las chicas. En lugar de esto las chicas parecen recibir el mensaje más sutil, y dañino, de que estudiar matemáticas las hace menos femeninas.

A pesar de este mensaje, las chicas se interesan por las matemáticas de igual manera que los niños al comenzar en la escuela secundaria. Las chicas se matriculan en cursos para principiantes (por ejemplo, Algebra I y Geometría) tan frecuentemente como los chicos. A medida que prosiguen en sus estudios, su interés y su confianza disminuyen y no se matriculan en cursos más avanzados.

Esto representa un problema. Según el National Center for Education Statistics (Centro Nacional para Estadísticas de Educación), tomar cursos de matemáticas influye enormemente en el logro escolar del estudiante. Los estudiantes que toman seis o siete cursos de matemáticas tienen *tres veces* más éxito que los que toman sólo uno! (El número de cursos que se siguen en Inglés y Estudios Sociales no ejerce tanta influencia).

La mayoría de los estudios sugieren que si chicos y chicas toman la misma cantidad de cursos de matemáticas, ambos salen igualmente bien en sus estudios. Un reciente estudio indica que las chicas salen mejor. ¿Por qué entonces pierden las chicas el interés y la confianza en su abilidad para las matemáticas en la escuela secundaria?

No lo sabemos con seguridad. Sea lo que sea, está claro que nosotros tenemos la culpa si las chicas están menos preparadas en las matemáticas que los chicos. En general, no se desarrolla la aptitud para las matemáticas en las chicas tanto como en los chicos. Esta tendencia hace difíciles las comparaciones. El hecho es que las matemáticas no pueden ser sólo para chicos porque de ella dependen muchas cosas.

Una persona que entienda bien las matemáticas puede hacer mejor casi cualquier trabajo en el mundo moderno. Entre estos se incluyen tanto la enseñanza y la enfermería como la ingeniería y la administración de empresas. Varias generaciones han demostrado que las mujeres pueden hacer estos trabajos tan bien como los hombres. Es importante que una joven sepa bien las matemáticas, no importa el tipo de trabajo que escoja.

Las chicas necesitan buenos maestros de matemáticas que las estimulen y les den confianza en sí mismas; profesores que esperen de ellas buen trabajo y las ayuden con este reto en las clases. Los padres y parientes necesitan enseñarles a las chicas que las matemáticas forman parte de la educación de una mujer.

Este artículo ha sido preparado por el personal de ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) (Local ERIC sobre Educación Rural y Escuelas Pequeñas). ERIC/CRESS, subsidiado por el Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos, forma parte del Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) (Centro de Información de Recursos Educacionales). Existen 16 locales ERIC en el país. Para más información sobre los recursos del sistema ERIC y de ERIC/CRESS, llame gratis al 1-800/624-9120 (hora del este) y pregunte por "User Services." Para ordenar un ejemplar gratis de "How to Help your Child Learn Math" ("Cómo ayudar a su niño/a a aprender matemticas") llame al Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos al 1-800/424-1616.

Why Do Parents Like Some Teachers More Than Others?

All across America, if you ask, people will tell you who they think the good teachers in their schools are. Usually, they base their observations on their own experiences and those of their children. Often, it turns out that people name the same teachers. What do teachers do to get this response?

Probably the most important thing they do, of course, is help children so well that they develop a reputation for good teaching. Good teaching involves a host of things—knowing subject matter well; being able to explain it to students; setting high goals for students and helping them reach those goals; being well-organized and fair; asking good questions; and treating *all* students with respect.

Another thing good teachers do is build bridges with parents. Parents like to hear from their children's teachers; they are willing to do more to help their children learn than many teachers realize. At least this is what researcher Joyce Epstein has discovered.

Epstein, who works at Johns Hopkins University, studied the parents and teachers of almost 1300 students and found that

- parents liked teachers who gave them suggestions for working with children on learning tasks;
- good teachers gave such suggestions to all parents, not just to parents of successful students; and
- parents were willing to spend more time than they were typically asked on such activities.

Epstein discovered that, although newsletters are important for communication between home and school, they don't really improve parents' views of teachers.

Epstein found that parents most appreciated teachers who provided activities for parents and children to do together at home. What were these home learning activities? Reading aloud; signing homework; giving spelling or math drills; helping with homework; and asking about the school day. Good teachers apparently make such routines a regular part of their contacts with parents.

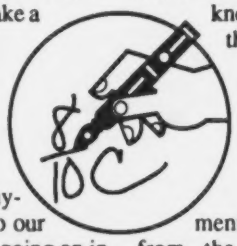
By the way, Epstein also found that parents liked their children's schools. But the parents believed that they could work more closely together with teachers.

A copy of "Effects on Parents of Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement" is available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service in Bethesda, MD (800-227-ERIC) at a modest price (Order Number ED 237 500).

You can also find out more about rural education by calling the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (800/624-9120). ERIC is like a national library about education, with 16 clearinghouses specializing in different topics. The computer-based ERIC system is operated by the U.S. Department of Education.

Keeping Track: Aren't Grades Enough?

When we send our children to school, we want them to learn. But what can we do to keep track of how much our children are learning? Isn't that what grades are for? As a matter of fact, grades are not always enough. For some children, parents need to take a closer look.



We can keep track of how much our children are learning in several ways. Some of them are ordinary things that anyone can do: talking to our children about what is going on in school each day, insisting that they show us their schoolwork, and reviewing their homework with them. Another ordinary thing to do is to stay in touch with the teachers. Teachers can give us their view of our children's classroom performance. That includes their grades.

For perhaps half of all children, doing these ordinary things is usually enough. But not always. Most parents know that low grades signal the need for a closer look; but very high grades also signal the need for a closer look, according to experts on talented children. Children who receive very high grades may not be adequately challenged, and consequently they may be learning the bad lesson that everything in life is easy.

Grades can alert you to a problem, but they don't really measure changes in a child's learning ("achievement"). Changes in learning are reflected in the difference in what a child knows as time passes. Certain kinds of achievement tests are made to reflect those changes accurately—more accurately than grades or close contact with a child or the child's teachers.

These tests—called "individually-administered tests of achievement"—sample a broad range of knowledge and compare the learning of an individual child with the learning of many. They are given by one examiner to one child at a time.

Individual achievement tests are very different from the "group-administered tests of achievement" often given in schools. The group achievement tests can be used to measure the learning of a group, but they are not very sensitive to changes in individual students. Parents who are concerned about their children's learning can ask schools to help them get individual achievement testing.

A discussion of test scores appears in "Reading Tests: What Does That Score Mean?" available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service in Bethesda, MD (800-227-ERIC) at a modest price (Order Number ED 275 750).

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What Does It Take to Do Well In School?

Parents can support their children's learning, even if they are not "advantaged." How? It has to do with effort: good students believe that their effort — not luck, an easy task, or a rigged game — is responsible for their success.

Any parent who cares can give children a good foundation that will support them all their lives. Parents reach their children at the ground-level, through their love and through what they want their children to become. School plays a role, too, and parents can help.

Remember that helping children do well in school does not necessarily mean helping them make all A's. It means expecting the best, whatever that may be. Make schoolwork and learning part of the family routine. Start slowly, be yourself, but make your interest consistent and steady. And don't be too hard on yourself; sometimes the daily routine gets pretty hectic. *The trick is to add a little bit of organization to the daily frenzy.*

Sure, money is important, but it cannot buy what children need most: the love, attention, and respect that go into a good upbringing. We're all in the same boat: what makes the most difference to our children is how we row the boat, not where we sit.

Sometimes people think that success comes *only* from good luck or natural ability, but it just isn't so. Effort counts a lot. Take the example of Japan. To the Japanese, effort is more important in school success than family background, ability, or luck. Many people are saying that's part of the reason why Japanese elementary and secondary schools seem to produce high levels of learning. In Japanese colleges and universities, however, students aren't asked to work as hard. The result? They learn less, and American students, who are asked to put out more effort in college, seem to catch up!

Parents can make sure children know they expect the best, and that best effort requires hard work. They can also show their children a number of routines to help them pay attention, remember facts and ideas better, take notes and study, and take tests better.

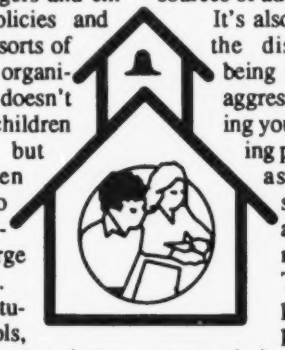
You can order copies of "How to Help Your Children Achieve in School" from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service in Bethesda, MD (800-227-ERIC) at a modest price (Order Number ED 233 814).

You can also find out more about rural education by calling the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (800/624-9120). ERIC is like a national library about education, with 16 clearinghouses specializing in different topics. The computer-based ERIC system is operated by the U.S. Department of Education. (Heidi Lehmann, a parent in Helvetia, West Virginia, helped a lot in developing this article. Thanks, Heidi!)

Can Parents Get More Out of School Meetings?

At one time or another, most children have trouble in school. Why? What can parents do when things seem to be going wrong?

Schools are organized the way the modern world prefers them to be: there are managers and employees, formal policies and procedures, and all sorts of specializations. The organization of schools doesn't mirror the way children learn very well, but schools have been structured this way to help make them efficient in handling large numbers of students.



The problem for students in some schools, and for most students at one time or another, is that it's easy for them to get lost in the machinery of efficiency.

Researchers have identified many of the ways students can get lost. They have noted that some schools do not seem to welcome parents. But the researchers believe that most schools can get more involved with parents, and educators are hearing more and more about the importance of working actively with parents.

When *you* notice problems with your children, however, you can take the initiative, and plan a school visit. Don't put it off until problems get firmly established. You know your child best, and you are entitled to communicate your concerns.

It's good to identify what you think the problem is, in advance, if you can. If possible, decide on some alternative solutions to suggest to school staff. You may need to get help: a neighbor, someone in the PTA, a teacher, or a professor (in the education department) at a nearby university might be good sources of advice.

It's also good to remember the distinction between being assertive and being aggressive (hostile). Stating your views and proposing plans frankly is being assertive; blaming someone, angrily, and seeking punishment is hostility. That's why it's important to identify the problem and offer some solutions. It gives you something to assert: a *statement* to make and a *goal* to achieve. In meeting with school people you are trying to work something out to help your child, and that takes self-control. If something can't be worked out, then you need to explore other options.

To order complimentary copies of "How to Make School Visits Work," call the U.S. Department of Education at 800/424-1616.

To find out about using the archives of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) to answer your questions about schooling in rural areas, call the Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (800/624-9120). ERIC, with 16 clearinghouses specializing in different topics, is a federally-funded source of documents for everyone interested in education.

Is Reading So Important Anymore?

Of all the subjects taught in school, none receives so much attention as reading. But how important is reading in today's world, where we get so much of our entertainment and information on radio and television?

Most of what we see or hear on radio and TV is produced by large organizations for large audiences. Books and articles, on the other hand, are created by many different individuals and organizations for a wide variety of purposes. Reading is more important than ever, because too much TV and radio leads children to believe that the world is a much simpler, a much easier, or a much more frightening place than it really is. People who read regard life more thoughtfully than those who only watch television.

Actually, reading is a new phenomenon. In 1800, very few people could read, less than 2% of the population. Since then, all sorts of changes have made reading a useful skill (not to mention its importance for thinking about and understanding the world). Children who don't learn to read suffer in school and in life.

But learning to read is not just something that happens in school. How could it be, since our world is filled with printed words? Children learn their most important lessons at home—what's right and wrong, how to meet responsibilities, and how to tell what's important from what's foolish. Mostly, parents teach them those things.

Because they are naturally curious, children can learn to read in the same way. How can parents help? Simple things, like:

- buying books and magazines,
- making sure their children see *them* reading and writing, and
- keeping books in their children's bedrooms.

Of all things to do, however, *reading aloud to your children* is probably the best (though it takes the most time and effort).

Instead of watching television in the evening, try getting everyone together to hear an interesting book. Older children like to be read to as much as younger children. And, you may enjoy the experience yourself.

If you've never done it before, it will seem strange at first; television is a kind of addiction, and it will take effort to wean yourselves from it. If you make oral reading a *routine*, you will do more to help your children to understand and to value reading than anyone else can possibly do.

To order a free copy of "How to Help Your Child Become a Good Reader" call the U.S. Department of Education at 800/424-1616.

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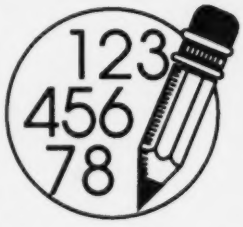
Why Don't Our Children Like Math?

A lot of students get turned off to math. How does it happen? Is there anything parents can do to help their children like math?

New studies suggest that students don't like math because they fail to see that math is more than a set of rules to be followed blindly. Having a child do math problems without understanding is to treat a child like a computer, a machine without an active mind and heart. Computers don't understand what they are doing. Learning, on the other hand, is understanding, and it requires an active mind and heart.



Many people like math. If you speak with them, they say they like math for a variety of reasons: math *makes sense*, math is *beautiful*, math is *useful*. Students who like math say that it is *fun* it is to solve problems. Those answers seem like fantasy to anyone who hasn't been given the chance to understand math. But to the students and adults who like math, the answers are absolutely true. In fact, those answers can be true for anyone.

Talking about math has been shown to help. Poor instruction in math relies a lot on worksheets and very little on talking about ideas and concepts—as a result, the understanding that is so important to learning math gets lost.

All of this can worry parents, who naturally want their children to do well in school and in life. However, there are things parents can do, even if they don't really like math themselves.

Children are naturally curious, and the ideas of math make great games to play. The earlier you start playing math games, and the longer you stay involved in playing such games, the more likely it is that your children will understand math.

For example, a skill that is important in all of mathematics (from arithmetic through calculus) is the idea of *fractions*. Parents can use puzzles made for young children to help introduce fractions. Sitting down and talking with your children — having them recognize parts of a whole puzzle (halves, thirds, and fourths for puzzles with three, four, or five parts) — can be a start.

To order a free copy of "How to Help Your Child Learn Math," call the U.S. Department of Education at 800/424-1616.

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